

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an overview of the research which consists of research background, statement of problem, research purposes, research significances, and definition of key terms.

#### **1.1 Research Background**

Feminism, as a social and political movement, has played an important role in shaping modern society by fighting for gender equality (De Beauvoir, 2010). Since its emergence, feminism has gone through various waves, each focusing on issues facing women in their time, such as suffrage, access to education, and property ownership in the first wave, to issues of workplace discrimination and domestic violence in the second wave. The third wave introduced a more inclusive approach by recognizing differences in women's experiences based on race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

The latest wave of this feminism movement is called Post-feminism. According to Gill (2007) post-feminism is more of a response to feminism itself, which often adopts the narrative that gender equality has been achieved, and therefore the feminist movement is no longer relevant or needs to be criticized. In the context of popular culture, post-feminism is also associated with individualism and female empowerment that is commodified by the media industry and capitalism (McRobbie, 2009). However, post-feminism does not only claim that gender equality has been reached, but it also shapes how femininity and feminism are performed in society. As Butler (1990) explains, gender is not something that people inherently are, but something that is done. It is performed and reinforced through repeated actions and social expectations.

In this context, some individuals perform feminism not as a movement for equality but as a tool for personal advantage, leading to what is known as pseudo-feminism. This phenomenon occurs when individuals, under the guise of feminism,

try to fight feminism goals (gender equality) but twist it to the wrong way. People, women in particular, must think the main challenge facing the feminism movement is because of the control of patriarchy which it can't be denied that become one of it. However, at the same time they don't realized that woman is also the problem, they are the ones who destroy the image of feminism.

This pseudo-feminism phenomenon or fake feminism leads a belief that women are superior to men and should have more rights. This is certainly a degradation for feminist ideas which uphold gender equality whereby women also want to be seen as human. Since, being a woman does not grant the right to take over others' rights (Jayseema & Dominique, 2023).

In other word, the biggest issue today is that women have started using their rights, privileges, and most importantly, their gender, maliciously (Sharma, 2022). They make themselves out to be feminists while assuming they must beat men all the time with those things. The thing they may not realize is they're creating a 'feminist paradox' arguing that the definition of success means defeating men by becoming strong, becoming what men look like in getting job, responsibility, or thinking, when actually they just stuck with a masculine definition of success and it's not how feminism work. Using gender make it as privilege, women want to take over since they hate the domination of man. Thus, pseudo-feminism mirrors the very patriarchal system it claims to oppose.

Besides, a lot of ideas of pseudo-feminisms are off the mark but people ignore. For instance, at the case of sexual harassment. In 2014, woman, in the name of feminism try to utilize people, especially males and other women who support equality. About 53.2% of the rape cases reported by the Delhi Commission of Women (DCW) were untrue. Those women planned to get the man's wealth by victimizing themselves. Furthermore, when it soars to 90%, the percentage is only going to increase. This give a serious effect that these situations are now a factor in fragile society and weak economy (Sharma, 2022). Obviously this would be different if the victim was a woman, a case would definitely be handled properly. Male harassment is never taken as a matter of concern instead the men themselves

normalize it by thinking that it's a compliment. According to Alliance (2008) the reason men are unwilling to tell about the sexual harassment happened to them is due to social construction, they think it will affect their masculinity image.

The consequent of this phenomenon ideas breaks point of feminism movement, making it very difficult for feminists to find space in society. Women who have this belief only destroy the image of other feminist women who have tried to create equality for the survival of women themselves. So that this research try to depict the reality of society that no one should ignore anymore: men and women. If this ideas continues to develop, what has been obtained by feminist fighters so far will definitely be in vain (Jayseema & Dominique, 2023).

Unfortunately, people rarely realize the spread of this pseudo-feminism concept since it a gentle movement through social media, TV broadcasts, songs, and even popular culture such as song, game, comic or film. Films are certainly a platform that can spread something massively considering that people of all ages love watching it. As Bordwell et al.(2008) state that Information and ideas are communicated by films, and places and ways of life that might not otherwise be known are shown to us. Important as these benefits are, though, something more is at stake. It means that movies also can spread ideas that shape people's thoughts about something even a tool for social and political change.

In addition, films have the power to shape perceptions and stereotypes in society. With strong visuals and compelling narratives, films are able to create certain images of culture, gender, and social norms that are then internalized by the audience (Sudarisman, 2016). As explain by Petrie & Boggs (2018) movies are not just entertainment, but also a means of communication that can convey moral messages, ideologies, and social criticism. Through the characters and storylines presented, movies can influence the way individuals understand an issue, either consciously or unconsciously.

In various popular culture products including movies, frequently deploy feminist thinking, surely to promote the idea of feminism that seeks equality

between men and women in society. Just like recent movie released in 2023, *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig. This movie successfully earned 1.446 billion USD or 23 billion rupiah, 83% rating from Rotten Tomatoes and became the top global box office ticket selling, breaking records for female directors. Dozens of awards from lot of awards nominations have been won by this film, one of those in the most prestigious Oscars in 2024, *Barbie* won the award for Best Original Song. Moreover, in the interview with ABC News in-depth, Greta Gerwig as a director and Margot Robbie as an actresses stated that this is a feminist movie. “*I, I mean it most certainly is a feminist film*” said by Greta then Margot add margot added that if it's too simple to say it's a typical comedy movie, it's like a huge slice of the pie.

Basically, *Barbie* is about a main character named Barbie who has a perfect life every day. Barbie Land, where she lives, is a portrait of the most feminist place in the world, there is where women are told they can be anything and anyone. One day, Babie somehow starts thinking about death and the next day her tiptoe feet become flat. She panics, thinking that her 'perfection' will disappear then she will turn into an ugly barbie. So she has to travel to the real world to figure out what is happening to her by meeting the child who plays her. Many people, especially feminists, are amazed by the narratives/dialogues in this movie that feel very feminist. Because of the movie is a semi-musical, the song that is made feels like a voice of women's power.

Nevertheless, in this research, the researcher tries to analyze films that audiences think are feminist. Are movies that claim to be feminist really feminist? This is important to explain since films itself has a big influence on the construction of people's mind, in this context persfpective about feminist values. *Barbie* has a large number of viewers, everyone knows Barbie, therefore the researcher feels it is important to prove that this film is feminine or fake feminism.

Furthermore, the power relations between men and women in *Barbie* (2023) become an important point in understanding the pseudo-feminism displayed. Gender inequality and power imbalance in the story are not only the background

for the emergence of pseudo-feminism, but also illustrate how domination and subordination are systematically shaped through social discourse. Therefore, understanding the power dynamics between men and women in this film is key to uncovering how the film ideologically shapes perceptions of feminism.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is used by the researcher to analyze the *Barbie* film. This approach helps to see how gender identity in the film is not only portrayed, but also performed by the characters and the story (Butler, 1990). In addition, this theory will help understand how the way the characters in this film play their gender roles can strengthen or weaken the actual concept of feminism.

Along with the theory of post-modern feminism by Butler, this research also applies Foucault's theory of power to analyze how this *Barbie* displays the dynamics of power in it which Foucault (1980) believes that power comes from anyone anywhere, its existence will be repeated and preserved to bind the oppressed side. The strongest power is when it becomes a discourse or system of statement believed by society (Nurrachman, 2023).

In addition, Dillon (2018) suggests through the lens of deconstruction, the intricate layers of meaning embedded within cinematic narratives can be unveiled, and the underlying power dynamics and ideological constructs that shape our understanding of gender and identity can be exposed. However, this shows that movies as a media of social change containing ideologies built as well as possible can be examined with the other perspective. Like the *Barbie* in this study, which will be observed from the deconstruction of the feminist ideology it presents.

This research was previously inspired by several previous studies. First, scientific research was conducted by Mutiara (2024) entitled *A Critique of Patriarchy in the World of Dolls in Greta Gerwig's Barbie* (2023). Mutiara examined the representation of patriarchy that persisted in the narrative of *Barbie* (2023) despite efforts to highlight feminism and gender equality. This research used Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy. The results showed that while the movie

challenged gender stereotypes and featured diverse Barbie characters, elements of patriarchy, such as unrealistic beauty standards and female subordination, remained evident. This research contributed by critiquing patriarchal narratives in popular media and their impact on gender perceptions in society. In contrast, this research focuses on the concept of pseudo-feminism in *Barbie* (2023), specifically how cultural representations and social dynamics portray feminism that actually undermine the feminist movement itself.

Second, research was conducted by Ramdhan (2024) entitled *Masculinity Depictions in the Barbie (2023) Film*. In this research, Akmal used Beynon's (2002) theory of masculinity to explore traditional and stereotypical elements of masculinity, such as courage, dominance, and leadership. It was shown how Ken's character in the film *Barbie* (2023) illustrated masculinity through physical aspects and mentallicity. The contribution of this research was that it provided a new understanding of how masculinity was represented in mainstream media and how it reflected gender relations in society. Besides, this research rises the issue of pseudo-feminism in the same film, highlighting how social elements and narrative dynamics are used to portray fake feminism.

Third, research was conducted by Nabila (2024) entitled *Redefining the Adventure Formula in Barbie (2023) Directed by Greta Gerwig*. Nabila analyzed the application of the adventure formula in the movie *Barbie* (2023). Using Cawelti's theory of the adventure formula, the results showed that the movie successfully adapted the traditional adventure formula while breaking gender stereotypes by placing a female character as the main heroine. The contribution of this research was the redefinition of the adventure formula with a feminist perspective, shifting the focus from heroic masculinity to the experience of women as protagonists. The difference with this research lies in its focus on the adventure genre, while this study seeks to examine the dynamics of gender power and fake feminism in film representation.

Finally, scientific research was conducted by Bobaru (2024) entitled *Reimagining Barbie: A Feminist Analysis of Iconography and Consumerism in the*



*Age of Gender Reevaluation*. Bobaru analyzed the film *Barbie* (2023) in the context of gender discourse and consumerist culture, exploring its role as a feminist artifact as well as a commercial product. Using feminist theories from Betty Friedan and Naomi Wolf, as well as critical studies of Barbie culture from Robin Gerber and Mary F. Rogers, this research highlighted the tension between the representation of feminism in the film and the commercial exploitation of feminist ideals. The results showed that although *Barbie* (2023) attempted to carry the theme of female empowerment, the film still operated within the realm of capitalism that exploited the iconography of feminism for market benefit. In contrast, this study focuses on the concept of pseudo-feminism in *Barbie* (2023), specifically how cultural elements and social dynamics in the film present feminism that actually weakens the feminist movement itself.

Based on the explanation that the researcher has conveyed, the researcher chose the title *Pseudo-Feminism Portrayed in Greta Gerwig's Barbie (2023)* as research. In this study, researchers aims to examine how *Barbie* (2023) represents feminism and whether the narrative built in the film reflects true feminism or falls into the category of pseudo-feminism.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Based on the research background explained above, the researcher tries to analyze social problem that focuses on the main topic which is pseudo-feminism contained in *Barbie* film (2023) by Greta Gerwig through scenes and dialogues displayed from each scene found. Therefore, the researcher suggests that there are at least two things become a major question towards the presence of this film as a public consumption labeled as a feminism film.

1. How is pseudo-feminism portrayed in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023)?
2. How does the power dynamic between men and women lead to pseudo-feminism in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023)?

### **1.3 Research Purposes**

In relation to the formulation of the problem, this research has two objectives to be achieved:

1. To analyze the portrayal of pseudo-feminism in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023);
2. To analyze the power dynamics between men and women that lead to pseudo-feminism in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023).

### **1.4 Research Significances**

The results of this study are expected to provide valuable contributions to both academic and social fields. Theoretically, this research seeks to expand and enrich the understanding of pseudo-feminism as depicted in film, particularly in *Barbie* (2023) by Greta Gerwig. By analyzing the power dynamics between men and women and how pseudo-feminism is portrayed, this study can deepen the academic discourse surrounding feminist representation in popular media and the presence of this film as a public consumption labeled as a feminist film turns out representation of how women use feminism to gain positions of power that put other women at a disadvantage.

Practically, this research is anticipated to offer useful insights for readers and future researchers who are interested in examining gender issues and feminist portrayals in contemporary films. It will provide a foundation for those aiming to explore similar topics, contributing to a broader understanding of the impact media representations have on societal views about feminism and gender equality.

### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

In order to clarify the key terms used in this research, some definitions are put forward:

#### **1. Film Studies**

The study of film as an art form, communication medium, and cultural representation. In this study, films are analyzed from various aspects, such as



narrative, visual aesthetics, production techniques, and how films function in social and historical contexts (Bordwell et al., 2008).

## **2. Power Dynamic**

A concept that describes power relationships between individuals or groups within a social system. Power dynamics can be seen in a variety of situations, such as politics, work relationships, or everyday social interactions, where one party has more control or influence than the other (Foucault, 1976).

## **3. Pseudo-feminism**

Phenomenon where women label themselves as feminist who want gender equality between men and women but turns out they only use their gender as women to get more rights whether it is in the form of superiority, or other privilege (Jayseema & Dominique, 2023).

## **4. Mise-en-Scene**

Terms in performing arts and visual production that include the arrangement of elements in a frame or stage, such as lighting, layout, props, costumes, and actors' expressions. Mise-en-scène is used to create atmosphere, build character, and convey messages or symbols in a work (Bordwell et al., 2008).

## **5. Cinematography**

Techniques in the visual arts that relate to the way images are shot include framing, lighting, composition, camera movement, and use of color. Cinematography plays an important role in shaping visual aesthetics as well as influencing how the audience captures and understands a scene or image (Brown, 2016).